DANTE'S ECLOGUES

WILMON BREWER

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DANTE'S ECLOGUES

Dante Alighieri

DANTE'S ECLOGUES

(The Poetical Correspondence between Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio)

Translated from the Latin into English Blank Verse

BY

WILMON BREWER

THE CORNHILL PUBLISHING COMPANY
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TO

My Mother

THIS WORK IS GRATEFULLY
AND
LOVINGLY DEDICATED

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PREFACE

Dante's *Eclogues* have appeared already in three English versions, all of them suitable primarily for those who approach Dante as scholars. In offering a fourth translation, I have desired to serve rather that much larger class of readers who approach Dante as lovers of good literature. Accordingly, the principles which have guided me have differed widely from those of earlier translators.

By following closely the words and turns of phrase in the original, my predecessors have sacrificed general interest and beauty of style, in order that the scholar might learn in accurate detail all that these four poems tell us of Dante and his time and might readily enjoy the poems in the original Latin. These advantages are best obtained in the prose version of Wicksteed and Gardner but also to a very considerable degree in the versions in blank verse prepared respectively by E. H. Plumptre and P. H. Wicksteed. The prose version offers the further advantages of including all the extant poetry of Dante's correspondent Virgilio and of gathering in carefully written notes, essays, and appendices detailed information of many kinds bearing on these poems. For the scholar, the existing versions are invaluable; but they do not attract those who read Dante as literature.

For this class of readers, I have designed the present translation. I have wished, therefore, to preserve the spirit rather than the letter of the original and to emphasize the qualities which these poems have in common with good poetry of all periods rather than qualities peculiar to a small group of Italian poets in the late Middle Ages. Passages which, if they were translated closely, would be obscure in language or thought to a modern reader, I have rendered freely, and unfamiliar proper names I have replaced, where possible, by those more generally known, in order that a modern reader might find no avoidable difficulty in enjoying the poetic charm of the work as a whole. Such freedom I have needed to use only rarely in the work of Dante and much oftener in that of Virgilio, for Dante's was a surer and more enduring art. But in all cases my reason was the same. To Dante and his contemporaries of literary taste these *Eclogues* were not obscure literary curiosities but poetry to be read with delight. I have tried to offer them in similar guise for readers of today.

The same purpose has guided me in the choice of comment. I have admitted only what would help the reader to enjoy the *Eclogues* as literature. They are first of all poems that were read for pleasure by Dante and his friends. Before each poem, therefore, I have given briefly a few facts familiar to the authors and first readers and indispensable for intelligent reading of their work. But

the *Eclogues* have also a very important place in the development of European literature — a fact that could be known only imperfectly to Dante and his friends. And, to give the modern reader this further advantage, I have added an essay discussing briefly the relation of these poems to European literature.

While preparing this work, I have consulted all authorities that seemed likely to afford valuable information about the *Eclogues* in particular or literature in general. I have given special attention to the English prose version of Wicksteed and Gardner, to a German version by Kannegieser and Witte, and to Professor Gardner's admirable short life of Dante. In the translation proper, I have profited several times by the researches of these authors into the meaning of disputed passages; but I have accepted their interpretation only so far as it accorded with my own quite different purpose, and the phrasing is in all cases my own. In the comment, I am indebted to the same authors for biographical information about Virgilio, Mussato, and Dante. The treatment of important movements in the history of European literature and their relation to Dante's *Eclogues* is my own, and after a careful search, I believe it has never been attempted before.

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GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO TO DANTE ALIGHIERI

SONG

GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO TO DANTE ALIGHIERI

SONG

During the late summer of 1318, Giovanni del Virgilio writes Dante what he calls a "song," really an epistle in Latin verse. He has read the *Inferno* and much, if not all, of the *Purgatorio* and admires them greatly, but he thinks it futile to compose such work in Italian and respectfully urges Dante to give it up. Dante would fare better, Virgilio believes, if he would attempt a Latin poem and treat some great political event of the time. As examples, Virgilio mentions the death of the Emperor Henry Seventh ("Jove's armor-bearer"), a defeat at Montecatini of the combined armies of Florence and Naples ("the flowers and lilies"), the defeat of the Paduans by Dante's friend Can Grande ("the great Molossian hound"), and the military and naval campaigns of Robert of Sicily against Genoa.[1]

Virgilio then urges Dante to visit Bologna and obtain the newly revived honor of the laurel crown.[2]

[1] To estimate the value of such advice, we may compare with the *Divine Comedy*, which Virgilio asks Dante to abandon, Milton's Sonnet *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont* and Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*, two of the best poems ever inspired by political events of the author's own time, yet both infinitely smaller and less valuable than the masterpiece of Dante.

[2] For further information about this and the succeeding poems see pp. 33 ff.

VIRGILIO: SONG

Auspicious Voice singing from Helicon,
That with new songs enchant the mortal sphere,
Calling the nations to the Tree of Life,
Marking the limits which a threefold lot
Assigns the spirit world — the guilty fallen
To Orcus, seekers of the stars by Lethe,
The blest enjoying realms beyond the sun;
Alas, why should you, like a prodigal,
Lavish your wisdom on the multitude,
While meager scholars pine without a taste
Of your prophetic store? A common man
Will draw the curving dolphins to his lyre,
A simpleton resolve the riddling Sphinx,
Before untutored minds would comprehend
The wisdom latent in Tartarean steeps
Or realms of heaven exceeding Plato's guess.
Of these the harlequin sometimes will prate
At village fairs before the gaping hinds —
A fool to banish Horace from the world —
Yet never understood. You will reply,
"My song is not for them, but those who can
Explore the depths of life." — In vulgar speech!

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The wise would turn from babble of the squares,
Though all the thousand dialects were one.
That company, of whom you are the sixth,
He whom you joined in his ascent to heaven,
Sang not in language of the market place.
Then, noblest judge of poets, I would plead,
If you allow brief audience for my plea:
Scatter not heedlessly your pearls to swine,
Nor clothe the Muses in unworthy rags;
But sing, in numbers that may bring you fame,
Prophetic verse — a poet for the world.

How many modern feats, as yet unsung,
Await your gift of immortality!
Tell how Jove's armor-bearer flew to heaven;
Tell how a plowman crushed the flowers and lilies;
Tell of the Phrygian deer that fled amain,
Their haunches torn by the great Molossian hound;
Tell of Ligurian mountains and the fleets
Parthanopaean in a song whose notes
May reach Herculean Gadës and compel
The tidal Danube and the famous isle,
Egyptian Pharos, listening, to admire
And bear your fame to Dido's ancient realm.

If fame be pleasing, you will never joy
In narrow limits and the vulgar shout.
Then, if you deem me worthy, I will rise,
Priest of Aönides, that bear the name
Of sweet voiced Maro, and the first to show
You in our college to the learned host,
Your glorious temples crowned with laurel wreaths
Diffusing myrrh, and feel such perfect joy
To see your triumph as the herald knows,
Riding in state to show the exulting throng
The sacred trophies that a prince has won.

My ears are startled by a martial peal:
Why, Father Apennine, that threatening look?
For what does Nereus raise the Tyrrhene sea?
Or Mars gnash at them both? Oh, strike the lyre
And charm away the sufferings of mankind!
All other singers wait for you to save:
If you are silent, none will speak the charm.

Yet, dweller by the Po, if I should seem
Worthy the visit of a friendly word,
And if these feeble numbers not offend,
Which the rash goose offers the clear voiced swan,
May you reply or grant my prayer, O Master.

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE I

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE I

Dante replies, probably in the spring of 1319. He writes in Latin verse and adopts the medium of Vergilian pastoral. To himself, his fellow exile Dino Perini, and his correspondent Virgilio he gives respectively the names of the Vergilian shepherds, Tityrus, Meliboeus, and Mopsus. He suggests that even such high poetry as Virgilio's may interest the common sort of men and praises Virgilio generously for his service to poetry. Welcome as a triumph would be, Dante fears Bologna and still hopes to obtain the honor in his native Florence, when he has completed the *Paradiso*.[1] Meanwhile, to convert Mopsus (Virgilio) from his prejudice against the language of the *Commedia*, he will send him ten measures of milk from his favorite ewe, i.e., ten cantos (not yet written) of the *Paradiso*.

[1] Similar hopes are expressed in the *Paradiso* (Canto 25, lines 1 ff. and Canto 1, lines 22 ff.).

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE I

On the white tablet we have read in black
Music that wafted from Pierian bay.

Numbering our wellfed goats, as herdsmen do,
I lay with Meliboeus, my young friend,
Sheltered beneath a widely spreading oak.
He, when he saw the missive, longed to share
My gladness at your song. Beseeching me,
"Tityrus, what would Mopsus have?" he cried.
"Tell me what Mopsus wishes." Though I laughed
At his presumption, Mopsus, more and more
He importuned me till my love for him
At length compelled me to subdue my mirth.

"Stupid," I said, "why should you play the fool?
Your proper care would be the herd, when you
Are not repining at our meager fare.
Those pastures are unknown to such as you
Where Maenalus with towering summit hides
The midday sun from all the slopes beneath
And many colored flowers adorn the grass.

Skirting those pastures, glides a little brook.
The silver willows bending from each bank
Dip in the leaping waters, and beneath
The thronging flowers are ever bright with dew.
Here countless springs which rise below the peak
Combine their waters in the rapid stream.
Mopsus amid such beauty, while the herd
Sports in the tender grasses, contemplates
Rejoicing all the work of gods and men
And by his reeds reveals his inner joy
So wondrously the herds will follow him;
Lions rush down the mountain and forget
Their native rage to hear the lovely sound;
The waves turn backward; and the wood and peaks
Maenaliän incline to hear him play.

"But Tityrus," he cried, "though Mopsus pipes
In unknown meadows, yet I could repeat
His unknown song to call my straying goats
Would you but teach it me!" What could I say,
When he persisted thus with bated breath?

"Upon Aönian mountains every year,
My Meliboeus, Mopsus tuned the pipe,
While others bickered in the courts of law.
He in the shadow of the sacred grove

Grew pale with study; drank continually
Poetic waters and the milk of song —
Full, often, to the very throat — and calls
Me to receive a crown green with those leaves
First known when Peneus' daughter changed her shape."

"What will you do?" young Meliboeus cried.
"Remain a shepherd here and never deck
Your brows in triumph with a laurel crown?"

"O Meliboeus, vanished with the breeze
Are all the poets' glories and their name.
Wakeful Mopsus the Muse has hardly saved,"
I said. Then indignation gave me voice:
"What joyful bleatings will the hills return
From every meadow, if with verdant head
I shall begin a paean on the lyre!
But let me fear those groves, those rural seats,
Ignorant of the gods. More fittingly
Should I receive the laurel on my brow
And hide beneath the leaves my silver hairs
Beside my native Arno, should I ever see
Again the pastures where they once were fair."

"Who doubts it?" he returned. "Yet do but think,
O Tityrus, how swift the flight of time!
For now the goats are old which were at first
The youthful mothers of our rising herd."

"When all the heavens turning about the earth,
All denizens of heaven, shall be revealed,
As all the lower realms, in song," I said,
"Gladly shall I receive the festive wreath
Of ivy and of laurel. For so long
May Mopsus give me time."

"Mopsus?" he cried.
"Look here, how he contemns the native speech
As trite chatter of women in the square,
Dress which the sacred muses would despise."

Reading your verses, Mopsus, I myself
Perceived 'twas true. He shrugged his shoulders, saying,
"What shall we try, if we desire to make
The thought of Mopsus friendly to your song?"

"A gentle ewe," I said, "is in my care, —
You know her well — so bountiful in milk
Her plenteous udders often sweep the grass.
Sheltered by yon high rock she ruminates

Her early meal. Not driven with any flocks
Nor jostling in a fold, she feeds apart
Yet willingly draws near at milking time.
Her I intend to milk with ready hands:
Ten of her brimming measures I will send
To Mopsus. Do you meanwhile intervene
Among these butting goats and whet your teeth
For the hard crusts that we are like to get."

In such discourse, I lay beneath the oak
With Meliboeus, while our cakes of spelt
Were baking for us in a little hut.

GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO TO DANTE ALIGHIERI

RESPONSIVE ECLOGUE

GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO TO DANTE ALIGHIERI

RESPONSIVE ECLOGUE

Virgilio writes again, probably in the late summer of 1319. The cantos of the *Paradiso* are not yet ready; but the Latin eclogue has come (brought perhaps by Dino Perini). Following Dante's example, Virgilio now uses the pastoral form and the Vergilian names. He is indebted especially to Vergil's *Second Eclogue*. He describes the extreme pleasure with which Dante's poem was received at the university of Bologna and declares that such work shows him to be another Vergil. Though he sympathises with Dante's wish for a triumph at Florence, he urges him meanwhile to enjoy the pleasures of Bologna, but he fears that Iolas (Dante's patron, Guido da Polenta) will not allow it. As a special inducement, he offers the society of Phrygian Muso (Albertino Mussato), who is coming to solicit the aid of Bologna against Can Grande. Virgilio hopes apparently that the admirable personal character and poetic abilities of Mussato will make him attractive despite his present alliance with Dante's enemies.

GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO TO DANTE ALIGHIERI

RESPONSIVE ECLOGUE

What time Savena dyes her snowy locks
With vernal green and, like a wanton nymph,
Hastens her course below well watered hills
To join the Rheno, I again had sought
My native cavern near their meeting place.
My bullocks, ranging down the shrubby bank,
Browsed eagerly; the nibbling lambs enjoyed
The tender and the kids the prickly herb.
What should I do — a solitary lad
Inhabiting the wild? The rest were gone,
Hastening their errands to the nearest town:
No Nisa, no Alexis were at hand,
My usual friends, to while the hours away.

Bearing a small sickle to the water's edge,
I had begun to cull those reedy pipes
Whose music might beguile my loneliness.
Then Tityrus began to sound his note
Far off beside the Adriatic shores,
Where venerable groves of pine defend

The pastures from the sun, uplifting spires
Innumerable, and the air is sweet
With myrtle blossom and with flowering herbs,
And where the River Ram, as he were loth
To trust his gentle fleece among the waves,
Moves slowly and revives the neighboring sand.
The music, wafting on an eastern breeze,
Which barely rustled while it stole along,
Diffused among the peaks of Maenalus
A vocal odor that embalmed the ear
And in the mouth distilled such wondrous milk
The eldest shepherds had not known the like,
Although they all were reared in Arcady.
The Arcadian nymphs exulted in the song;
Shepherds and herds and flocks and shaggy goats,
Both near and far, began to dance for joy;
Wild asses ran to hear with ears upraised;
Lycaean Fauns were leaping on the hill.

Then all amazed I said, "If Tityrus
Singing a shepherd lay can charm the flocks,
The goats, and hornéd herds, why did you seek
The noisome town to learn a courtly strain,
Shunning such Mincian reeds and pastoral song,
Although they once were native to your lips?
Henceforth may plowmen in the forest glades
Following their oxen hear you sing at dawn."

Dropping my urban reeds of larger stop,
I sought the slender quills and shepherd-wise
Warbled a prelude for responsive song.

Divine Old Man! ah, by these shepherd lays
You shall be Maro's heir, his only heir,
Or Maro's self returned — if we believe
The Samian sage! and yet may Mopsus dare,
As Meliboeus, to reply in song.
Ah, why should you continue still to live
Beneath a squalid and a sorry thatch,
To suffer wrong, and sigh for Arno's meads
Denied your flocks, a never ending shame
To that ungrateful city! Water not
Your Mopsus' cheeks continually with tears;
Afflict not cruelly yourself and him,
Whose love embraces you, O kindly sage,
As close (I fable not) as ever vine
With hundred turns enfolds the noble elm.
O, if in happier times you should behold,
Mirrored amid your spring, your silver hairs,
Adorned by Phyllis' self, your sacred hairs,
Turning again to fair, with what a strange
And sudden rapture would you feel anew
The coolness of your thickly-spreading vine!
Waiting that happy hour, lament no more
Your weary exile, change it for delight,

Sharing the peaceful cavern where I dwell.
Together we will sing; I as a youth
With modest pipe, but you with master strain
Triumphantly — suiting the age of each.

Your presence here kind nature's self invites.
A cooling spring rises within the cave;
The rocks give shelter and the copsewood shade;
The marjoram breathes incense; poppies bring
Refreshing sleep — forgetfulness of woe.
Your couch Alexis, called at my desire
By Corydon himself, shall strew with thyme.
Nisa, the willing and the deft, herself
Shall lave your feet, and bring a savory feast,
While Thestylis shall season mushrooms well
With pepper and shreds of garlic and shall watch
Lest Meliboeus quite unwittingly,
Searching the garden, gather aught amiss.
While feasting, you shall hear the murmuring bees
That sing of honey. Apples you shall taste
Lovely as Nisa's cheek and others spare
Preserved by even rarer loveliness.
Already ivies spread above the cave,
Garlands prepared for you! No joy shall fail.

Come hither! Hither will they come who thirst
To see you, young and old of Arcady,

Ready to admire new songs and learn the old.
Flesh of the woodland roebuck, spotted skins
Of lynxes, they shall bring you in return
As once your Meliboeus loved to do.

Come hither, Tityrus! Nor fear our groves.
The lofty pines have bowed their storm-tossed heads,
The oak trees rich in mast, the lowly shrubs
Have joined their plighted faith. Not here the snares,
Nor here the violence that you would shun.
Dare you not trust yourself to me, that love you?
Do you contemn my realms? — Even the gods
Were not ashamed to live in hollow caves:
Chiron be witness, who in varied lore
Taught young Achilles; witness be the bright
Apollo, shepherd once in Thessaly!

Mopsus, you fondly dream! For Iolas
The courtly and urbane, denies your prayer,
Because your gifts are rustic and a cave
No safer than the hut, where he prefers
To dwell in luxury. Then what desire
Kindles an expectation in your heart?
What newborn eagerness stirs in your feet?
The maiden looks with wonder on the boy;
The boy himself admires the bird; the bird
Admires the woodland; woods the vernal breeze:

So, Tityrus, does Mopsus look on you,
And wonder turns to love. Do not contemn!
With Phrygian Muso I will quench your thirst,
Delight unknown to you, that ever drank
Of your ancestral stream.

But why this while
Does yonder heifer low? Her dewy flanks
Perchance are burdened with the udder's weight.
Such is my guess; I rise and run in haste
To fill my ample bowls with the new milk,
And soften the hard crusts for Tityrus.
Come for the milking! we will send to him
As many measures as he promised me —
Yet haply we presume, if we should send
Milk to a shepherd. — While I speak, behold
My comrades and the sunset on the mount!

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE II

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE II

Dante probably received the *Responsive Eclogue* from Perini, when the latter returned after a visit to Bologna. He waited, we are told, a year — perhaps until the spring of 1321 — before preparing his answer. Dante now transfers his pastoral scenes to Sicily, the original home of pastoral poetry. He borrows notably from Vergil's *First Eclogue*. The following poem he represents as written not by Tityrus but about him. Tityrus is described as very old — Dante himself was probably much older than his years. The new friend, Alphesiboeus, was a distinguished physician, Fiduccio dei Milotti. Polyphemus stands probably for Robert of Sicily, leader of Dante's political enemies, whose vicars had shown great cruelty to the Florentine exiles and had sentenced Dante to death if he should ever come into their power.

The *Second Eclogue* is almost the last utterance of Dante, and was not sent to Virgilio until after his death.

Samuel Hopkins

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

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Dante Alighieri

DANTE ALIGHIERI TO GIOVANNI DEL VIRGILIO

ECLOGUE II

Emerging from a veil of golden fleece,
Swift-footed Éöus and the other steeds
With wingèd feet drew on the lovely sun;
Still in the zenith, near that point from which
The course dips westward, either flying wheel
Maintained an even height. Beneath the rays
Each sunlit rock and tree, that otherwhiles
Would spread a longer shadow on the grass,
Stood brilliantly above a lesser shade
Allowing all the countryside to glow.
Tityrus, therefore, and Alphesiboeus
Betook them to a wood, which might revive
Their flocks and yield themselves refreshing shade, —
A wood of ash with many linden trees
And sycamores. And, while their sheep and goats
Reposed themselves upon the woodland grass,
Their nostrils sniffing every faintest air,
Tityrus, freighted with his many years
And with the drowsy odors, dozed a while
Protected by a maple's youthful shade.
Alphesiboeus leaning on a staff —
The little, knotty sprout of a pear tree, —
Stood near, and presently began to speak:

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"That human souls fly upward to the stars
From which they stooped to sojourn in our clay;
That snowy birds should make Caÿster sound
With joyful clang, whenever spring returns,
Happy in the mild skies and swampy vale;
That shoals of fishes gather in the sea
For spawning time and leave the wavy deep
Where first the rivers touch the Nereid realm;
That tigers of Hyrcania should defile
Caucasian mountains with unholy blood;
That Libyan serpents crawl upon the sand;
I marvel not, because his proper sphere
Brings every creature joy. But, Tityrus,
I marvel, as all other shepherds do,
With me inhabiting Sicilian fields,
At Mopsus — that those Cyclopean rocks
Of arid Aetna should delight him still!"

Just as he ended; panting, warm, and late
Appeared young Meliboeus and began,
Gasping and hardly capable of speech:
"O Tityrus, old men who saw me run
Laughed that a lad should labor so for breath
As much as those Sicilians laughed to watch
Sergestus bring his galley limping home."

DANTE: ECLOGUE II

Lifting his grey hairs from the verdant grass,
The elder shepherd then addressed the youth
Panting before him with both nostrils wide,
"Why, foolish boy, what is the newest cause
To make you run and overtax your lungs?"

He answered not, but when the reedy pipes
He brought along had met his trembling lips,
No simple tune surprised their avid ears;
For, while that boy was laboring to produce
His shepherd notes, the pipe itself breathed forth:
(I tell a marvel, yet it is the truth)
"What time Savena dyes her snowy locks."
Such was the magic, had he three times more
Essayed the stops, perchance a hundred songs
Would have entranced the quiet countryside!

Tityrus and Alphesiboeus both
Dreamed only of the purport of the song,
And when it ceased, Alphesiboeus first
Inquired of Tityrus, "Reverèd sage,
Dare you desert Pelorus' dewy fields
And venture to the Cyclopean cave?"

"Why do you doubt it?" Tityrus replied,
"Why do you so dissuade me, dearest friend?"

"Why do I doubt it? why do I dissuade?"
Alphesiboeus answered in alarm,
"Has it escaped you how the singing pipe
Conveys a message, favored by the god,
Just as those reeds sprung from the buried whisper
Conveyed the message of that king's disgrace
Who bathed, by counsel of the god of wine,
Turning the damp Pactolian sand to gold?
Fortunate sage, trust not the flattering bait
When it would draw you to a seaside realm
Strewn with Aetnaean pumice. Wrong not thus
The Dryads of our groves, wrong not your flocks.
Our hills and groves, our streams will weep for you,
When you are gone; the nymphs will wring their hands,
Trembling with me lest even worse befall.
That grudge will end which fell Pachynus bears!
The shepherds mourn that they should know their loss.
Fortunate sage, why should you wish to leave
These springs and fields famed for your deathless name?"

"Dear friend, deserving better than this heart
Can ever give," cried agèd Tityrus,
Touching his breast, "Mopsus allied with me
In equal love because of those who fled
Affrighted by Pyreneus' evil heat,
Imagines me an exile on those shores
Southward from Po and north from Rubicon

Where Adriatic meets the Aemilian land,
Commending pastures of the Aetnaean coast
As more to be desired. He does not know
We two are dwelling in the tender grass
Of a Sicilian mountain — never mount
In Sicil better nourished flocks and herds.
Pelorus and our slopes of verdant grass
Are more to be desired than Aetna's rocks!
Yet Mopsus would induce me to depart,
To quit my flock and go to share his cave,
If Polyphemus, you inspired not fear."

"Who," said Alphesiboeus, "would not shrink
From Polyphemus, used to stain his jaws
With human blood, even from that dreadful hour
When Galataea saw him tear the flesh
Of her deserted Acis? She herself
Barely escaped: would even the power of love
Have shielded her, while madness in his heart
Boiled with such wrath — more savage than a beast?
What should we fear, when Achaemenides,
A witness of his comrades' dreadful death,
Himself unharmed, barely retained his sense?
O dear as life! never, I pray the gods,
Never may such a fearful joy prevail
That Rheno and the false Savena lure
To Polyphemus this illustrious head,

For which the Pruner even now prepares
A fadeless wreath of laurel in the skies!"

Tityrus, laughing but in full accord,
Received in silence the great shepherd's words.
But now so low the chariot of the sun
Traversed the heavens that every rock and tree
Spread a far longer shadow on the grass.
Leaving the forest and the willowy vale
Now chilly grown, the shepherds turned their steps
Homeward behind their flocks. The shaggy goats
Went eagerly before, as if they knew
That softest meadows would reward their haste.

Meanwhile the cunning Iolas had lain
Concealed near by. All their discourse he heard;
All their discourse he told again to me.
Even as he told each circumstance to me,
I, Mopsus, have indited it for you.

THE LITERARY IMPORTANCE OF DANTE'S *ECLOGUES*

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Dante's *Eclogues*, or more exactly the poetical correspondence between Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio, are interesting to readers of the great European poets from several points of view.

They tell us, first of all, much that is little known about Dante. The four comparatively brief poems referred to collectively as the *Eclogues*, were written at an important period in the life of the divine poet. For sixteen years, Dante had been exiled from his native Florence, originally on an unfounded charge of malfeasance in office and afterwards chiefly because he supported in no uncertain terms the cause of the Emperor Henry Seventh and his successors, while the ruling party of Florence allied itself with the Pope and Robert of Sicily. After long years of wandering, Dante now had settled in Ravenna and was enjoying the patronage of Guido da Polenta, nephew of the famous Francesca da Rimini. Perhaps he was serving as a lecturer on poetry at the university of Ravenna; but undoubtedly his chief work was the completion of his *Divine Comedy*. Already the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* had appeared and were arousing widespread interest. He had still to prepare his *Paradiso*.

At this moment, Giovanni del Virgilio engaged Dante in the brief, semiprivate correspondence that comprises the *Eclogues*. Virgilio was a young scholar of Bologna, a lecturer at the University. Though Bologna was a center for the study of law, he gave instruction in the great Latin poets and later he became himself a Latin poet of moderate fame. The chief subjects of his correspondence with Dante were the possibility of Dante's coming to Bologna and Dante's obtaining the honor of the laurel crown. This decoration the Romans had awarded their leading poets down to the time of Statius and the Paduans had revived, a few years before the time of Virgilio's letter, to honor their eminent author and statesman, Albertino Mussato. Later it was to adorn the temples of Petrarch at Rome and to be adopted by English royalty for distinguishing the laureate poets of England. But Dante thus far had received no public recognition of his poetry.

Virgilio's part of the correspondence, the *Song* and the *Responsive Eclogue*, make unusually clear the attitude of conservative men of letters towards *The Divine Comedy*. This new masterpiece they regarded, much as conservative Elizabethans regarded the new masterpieces of their drama, with an air of condescension. To many, probably the majority, of Dante's contemporaries, Latin appeared the only medium for literature that hoped to be famous and enduring. Any work written in a modern tongue, as *The Divine Comedy* was, they felt sure would

be read only within the small area where its particular dialect was used and during the few years before that dialect gave place to some other. Their attitude is of great importance in the history of literature, for it was by no means peculiar to the contemporaries of Dante. It prevailed throughout western Europe at almost all times during the Middle Ages. It retained such force in the Renaissance that several very influential authors wrote little or nothing in their own tongue. Even Milton debated whether he should write his masterpiece in Latin and decided with some misgivings in favor of English. The three generations following Milton continued to hold a large measure of the same belief, and more than one admirer of *Paradise Lost* translated it into Latin in order to secure its immortality. And even at the end of the third quarter of the eighteenth century Dr. Johnson preferred to compose his epitaphs in Latin and assigned as one of his reasons that by writing in Latin he should insure their being permanently and widely understood.

Preference for Latin as a medium of dignified literary expression probably had been well founded in the six or seven hundred years immediately succeeding the fall of Rome. During what would otherwise have been a period of utter confusion, the use of Latin preserved some continuity with ancient culture and allowed educated men throughout Europe to coöperate with one another in developing a modern civilization.

During the later Middle Ages and the Modern Period, however, the continued preference for Latin became more and more ill founded. Modern languages, understood by all ranks of people in their respective countries, became sufficiently stable and general in their use to assure a great literary work permanent value. They grew sufficiently rich and flexible to meet all former requirements of literary expression and could adapt themselves continually to the new requirements of modern life, while Latin was effective only for such ideas as were inherited from ancient Rome. The first modern language to attain these advantages was Italian and the first great author to demonstrate the fact was Dante. Many other authors were soon to follow, first in Italy, and then in the other leading nations of Europe. Latin became continually less effective as a medium of expression, more infrequently used by authors, and more difficult for the majority of educated people to read. And to judge how decisive has been the triumph of modern languages we have only to compare the reputation of Milton's *Lycidas* with that of his great Latin elegy, the *Epitaphium Damonis*.

But, though Virgilio expresses the condescension of conservative literary men towards *The Divine Comedy*, he shows that nevertheless they read it with great interest and admiration. Here too their attitude resembled that of conservative Elizabethans towards the drama. However plebeian Dante's contemporaries may have thought

his medium of expression, they felt that he had genius in a rare degree, that he need only direct it more wisely to reach the summit of fame, and they applauded his first eclogue in Latin with an enthusiasm similar in nature to the enthusiasm of Elizabethans for the non-dramatic poetry of Shakespeare. Nor could we have better evidence of their admiration for the Divine Comedy than the reverence with which the prominent Latinist Virgilio addresses Dante, a poet of the despised vernacular.

Dante's part in the correspondence, *Eclogue I* and *Eclogue II*, makes clear several other little known aspects of Dante's career. Though he wrote extensively in Latin prose, these two eclogues are, so far as we know, his only work in Latin verse. They suggest that Dante, like Milton, might have attained considerable success as a neo-Latin poet, had he not preferred, even more decisively than Milton, to use his native speech. They show us Dante under circumstances very different from those which we find in his other work and illustrate his little known qualities of humor and affability. And they indicate that Dante's last years were far from the period of unrelieved misery that we have been taught to imagine. Great as his disappointments undoubtedly were, he found much to alleviate them in congenial surroundings, devoted friends, and the growing fame of his *Divine Comedy*.

But Dante's *Eclogues* are not interesting merely for what they tell us of Dante — for the attitude of contempo-

raries towards his work and for the unfamiliar aspects of his career. They mark a turning point in the history of pastoral literature. So preoccupied have students of this literature been with its more celebrated periods that the fact has hardly been mentioned. Yet even a brief review of the history of pastoral literature should make it clear.

Pastoral literature we may characterise briefly as the most persistent and famous expression of a longing felt by men living in courts and cities for a simpler, more natural life. It was a longing which rarely, if ever, could find practical expression. Even if the demands of personal ambition had given the courtier leisure to indulge in pleasures of the country, continual wars and lawlessness made it unsafe for him to venture beyond the walls of a fortified place. There developed, therefore, an imaginative and often very beautiful form of literature which purported to describe the simple joys and sorrows of shepherds and herdsmen but which really was more apt to show the author and his friends masquerading as shepherds or herdsmen and enjoying what were fancied to be the pleasures of quiet life in the country. Theocritus, the great poet of Alexandrian Greece, first made this kind of literature famous and established what we may call the Arcadian tradition. For the pastoral, which described an ideal of happiness rather than anything actually experienced, tended to preserve what had been described so delightfully by its great founder. It presents to us nearly always

Greek shepherds and herdsmen in a beautiful summer landscape, amusing themselves with simple dialogue or songs accompanied by primitive musical instruments and performing a few light, agreeable duties of their trade. Accepting this tradition, each author of a Pastoral harmonizes with it, so far as possible, the particular theme which interests him at the moment and adds occasionally some new detail of nature. The pastoral is, therefore, an artificial form of literature and in many cases has been merely conventional, yet the better examples of this class are illumined with rare freshness and beauty which give them undying charm.

Though Theocritus and later poets of Greece had established nearly all the artificial features of the Arcadian tradition, they retained something like the dialect of the country folk whom they pretended to describe. The youthful Vergil, who introduced the pastoral into Latin literature, seems to have been the first to use the language, as well as the ideas, of the cultivated class. He gave more importance, also, to the element of allegory. Titus Calpurnius followed his example about a hundred and Marcus Nemesianus about three hundred years later, but with little success. Theocritus and Vergil and the other poets of ancient times established the Arcadian tradition and left admirable examples of pastoral poetry, though Vergil alone was accessible to readers of the later Middle Ages.

The long centuries of the Mediaeval Period offer us from time to time a few feeble attempts in the pastoral manner; but both the spirit and the form of such work were foreign to that of ancient pastoral and show the effect of mediaeval traditions. Thus, in a Latin eclogue of the fourth century, an unknown Christian writer expounded the chief tenets of his faith. Four centuries later, Alcuin and Modoin of Autun employed the Latin eclogue to celebrate the beneficence of Charlemagne. Then at long intervals, from the ninth century until at least the eleventh, several ecclesiastics gave an Arcadian setting to their theological debates. In the tenth century and for two hundred years afterwards, a Benedictine monk would now and then compose an eclogue in honor of some Christian saint. All these Latin manifestations of the pastoral were of limited and temporary influence, serving only to keep alive a little interest in an ancient tradition. But writers of more frankly popular literature likewise attempted a modified form of pastoral and seem to have enjoyed a somewhat wider and more lasting influence. In the twelfth century, the pastoreta of Provence and the pastourelle of northern France began to recount in vernacular lyric verse the love of some knight for a shepherdess — foreshadowing the beautiful story of Sir Calidore and Pastorella in *The Faerie Queene*. All these mediaeval examples of the pastoral — both Latin and vernacular — were humble and desultory attempts, little noticed among

the more important literary forms of the time. All of them were blended with other and distinctly mediaeval forms of literature. For over a thousand years, no one had ventured to revive the ancient pastoral in its classic purity and beauty.

Then Dante wrote his Latin eclogues. They renewed the charms of Vergilian pastoral inspired by a genius of even greater power and originality. Once more the pastoral became a dignified form of poetry. During the rest of the mediaeval period, indeed, it remained only a minor form of literature; but it was attempted successively by many of the leading Italian poets, including both Petrarch and Boccaccio. Dante had restored the ancient pastoral to favor and had opened the way for its development in modern times.

The significance of the new movement became manifest in the Renaissance. At this time three important changes occurred and greatly promoted the writing of pastorals. Theocritus and the other poets of Greece were rediscovered to inspire their disciples of modern times; Latin, though still used occasionally, gave place as a rule to the author's native speech; and far greater prominence than ever before was given to the theme of love. The pastoral tradition now assumed major importance in practically all countries of western Europe. It affected every important form of literature, and appeared prominently in the work of authors as famous and as different in tem-

per as Tasso, Spenser, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Milton.

Even during the reaction from the Renaissance which prevailed in Europe of the eighteenth century, the pastoral tradition continued to enjoy considerable favor. It found expression in the poetry of men as noteworthy as Pope and Gay, in the paintings of Watteau, and in the famous shepherd colony founded by Marie Antoinette and her court ladies near the palace of Versailles.

The Romantic Movement at the close of the eighteenth century for a time interrupted the favor of Arcadian literature. Modern civilization had given authors more freedom of movement and had eliminated much of the war and violence which hitherto made country life an impossible ideal. Instead of merely longing for a simpler life, men could actually visit the country and describe from their own observation the life of nature and simple folk. These and other causes made them neglect for a while the cultivation of pastoral literature.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the same tradition reasserted itself in modified form. It occurred sometimes in poetry but more often in prose fiction and affected the literatures of England, Germany, and Scandinavia. It may linger even today.

Dante's *Eclogues* have great interest, therefore, on general grounds — for what they show us of Dante and for their place in the pastoral literature of Europe; but that is

not all. The four poems are well worth reading for themselves. The poems of Virgilio fall short of greatness. Yet they express very pleasingly an unselfish admiration for a greater poet and they offer passages beautiful in both thought and expression. The two eclogues of Dante show his most mature work. If we exclude from comparison such mixed literary forms as pastoral drama and pastoral romance, they deserve to rank with the greatest examples of pastoral poetry. They attain in rare measure to the freshness and poetic beauty essential for good writing of this kind. They combine keen observation of nature, variety of interest, and harmonious blending of diverse materials. And to these qualities, they add a genial humor very rare in the pastoral and at times an unusual solemnity from the great issues discussed.

The Alpine climber has sometimes the rare good fortune to follow a comparatively little and easily ascended ridge, so open and so happily placed in relation to the higher mountains that it continually surprises him with extraordinary views in many directions and commands the most inspiring vistas of Alpine scenery. Quite comparable is the experience of the reader of great literature who peruses the four brief poems of Dante's *Eclogues,* and quite comparable are the rare and splendid vistas which they offer him among the highest summits of European literature. On the side of biography, they afford him the brightest and most intimate glimpses of Dante's last

years — of his pleasant intercourse with his friends and his growing fame. On the side of language, they reveal that strong prepossession which for centuries haunted many of the best minds of Europe that Latin was the only language for great modern literature and the moment when Dante first vindicated the superiority of modern languages for the modern world. On the side of literary history, they show him Dante restoring the ancient pastoral after a millennium of neglect and initiating its long and distinguished career in modern times. And on the side of poetry, they offer the strange ideal charms of pastoral created by the genius which in the same years was inspiring the *Paradiso*.

Shakespeare's Influence on Sir Walter Scott

By Wilmon Brewer (*author of this book*)

This careful critical work, handsomely bound, over 500 pages, published by The Cornhill Publishing Company, Boston, Mass., is recommended by all good book stores — price $3.00.

WHAT THEY SAY OF IT

Never before has the entire evidence — of Shakespeare's influence on the work of Sir Walter Scott — been so thoroughly amassed and arranged. The task — evidently on Dr. Brewer's part a labor of love — has now been accomplished once for all.

(*January 10, 1926.*) *The New York Tribune*

A very scholarly and at the same time very delightful book. It is an important work, containing more than 500 closely printed pages, and presenting an immense amount of careful and discriminating research. Dr. Brewer finds Shakespeare's influence to be vital in fully seventeen of the Waverley Novels, and where that influence is strongest, the work of the novelist is intrinsically best and most famous.

All who love great literature and appreciate scholarly work will value this book.

(*March, 1926.*) *The Christian Endeavor World*

The book, to which he has given years of painstaking preparation, is one that no future scholar of either Shakespeare or Scott can well ignore. He has done his work so thoroughly and with such consistent fairness, that he leaves no room for doubt or controversy.

(*December 5, 1925.*) *The Boston Herald*

Reviews

From Sir Sidney Lee, Lexham Gardens, London, W. S.
25th November, 1925

Dear Dr. Wilmon Brewer:

The exceptionally suggestive and enlightening exposition of Shakespeare's influence on Sir Walter Scott seems to me a most satisfying piece of work. I congratulate you on a thorough piece of literary analysis. Believe me to be,

Yours sincerely,

SIDNEY LEE

It is remarkable that it should have taken more than a century for the world of scholarship to discover the full extent of Sir Walter Scott's indebtedness to Shakespeare. Dr. Brewer has shown beyond doubt that the Shakespearean influence pervaded not only Scott's work, but also his life; and in this volume, published after many years of research, he sets forth his conclusions and the evidence that supports them.

The method by which the subject is developed at once testifies to Dr. Brewer's scholarship and makes it particularly useful to students of English literature.

(*March 27, 1926.*) *The San Francisco Argonaut*

Dr. Brewer has produced the first extensive study to show Shakespeare's influence on Scott's life work. Future students of either author should not ignore this painstaking work.

(*April, 1926.*) *Washington Historical Quarterly*

The table of contents of this most interesting book tells in detail the story of the contents of the book, and the reader and the student will find it valuable as a reference book.

(*April 4, 1926.*) *The Atlanta Constitution*

Reviews

Here is a contribution to critical lore beyond critical estimate. The work of one who loves his subject, who literally lives it, who finds it worthy of exhaustive investigation, is in no need of any other than commendatory criticism.

The intrinsic interest and value of the work is of profound historical significance. Not only the effect of The Bard of Avon on the work and thought of the author of the Waverley Novels is outlined and analyzed; the subsequent influence of Scott and through him of Shakespeare himself on literary history and development in the English language is demonstrated with a clearness and convincing power that leaves those seeking enlightenment none other than the investigator's conclusion. Here is a work no student of English literature can afford to be without — such a study of comparative literary lights must needs contribute important value to the history of European literature.

(May 30, 1926.) *The Rochester Democrat, Chronicle*

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